

Israel Grafius House
Main Street
Alexandria
Huntingdon County
Pennsylvania

HABS NO. PA-5399

HABS

PA,

31- ALEX,

15-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historical American Building Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, DC 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

ISRAEL GRAFIUS HOUSE

HABS No. PA-5399

HABS
PA,
31-ALEX,
15-

Location: The Israel Grafius House is located at 215 Main St., two lots east of the northeast corner of Main and Bridge Streets, Alexandria, Porter Township, Huntingdon County, Pennsylvania.

Present Owner: Esther Kling.

Present Use: Single-family dwelling.

Significance: The house is an elegant and well-preserved example of the formal Federal-style dwelling type once common along Main Street. Prominently located in the center of historic Alexandria, its architectural features such as portico, fanlight, and double chimney are indicative of its occupation by prosperous merchant Nicholas Cresswell during the second half of the nineteenth century.

PART I. HISTORIC INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: ca. 1826-34 (tax records).
2. Original and subsequent owners: Israel Grafius House is located on lot No. 30 in the original borough plan. It fronts 60' on the south side of Main Street and extends back 200', bordered on the east and west by other town lots with residences.

The following is an incomplete chain of title to the land on which the structure stands. Reference is to the Recorder of Deeds Office of the County of Huntingdon, Pennsylvania.

1826 Deed July 18, 1826, recorded in Volume W1, Page 81.
George and Sophia Hyle
TO
Israel Grafius.

1830 Deed February 3, 1830, recorded in Volume W1, Page 82.
Israel and Elizabeth Grafius
TO
William Moore.

1830 Deed February 3, 1830, recorded in Volume W1, Page 83.
William and Rebecca Moore
TO
Joseph Adams.

- 1830 Deed February 3, 1830, recorded in Volume W1, Page 84.
Joseph Adams
TO
Henry P. Dorsey.
- 1846 Deed November 30, 1846, recorded in Volume F2, Page 439.
John P. Dorsey et al. (heirs of Henry Dorsey)
TO
Nicholas Cresswell.
- 1901 Deed May 9, 1901, recorded in Volume R4, Page 425.
Eliza Barr et al. (heirs of Nicholas Cresswell)
TO
John Phillips.
- 1902 Deed July 1, 1902, recorded in Volume V4, Page 81.
John Phillips
TO
Dr. John M. Beck; the house was occupied by numerous tenants, even after the property was inherited by Xopher Beck.
- 1960 Deed May 5, 1960, recorded in Volume 43, Page 337.
Union National Bank and Trust Company of Huntingdon (administrator for Xopher Beck, who died June 22, 1958)
TO
James and Esther Kling.
3. Original plans and construction: No original plans or drawings have been located. The five-bay, center-hall plan originally had a slate roof (Huntingdon County Historic Sites Survey).
4. Alterations and Additions: A one-story brick wing was created out of the first-floor rear portion of the gable-end porch at the northeast corner of the building, ca. 1902. This was used as a doctor's office when Dr. John M. Beck resided there. Later, a frame extension was added to the north wall of the brick block. Inside, a bathroom has been installed under the west side of the main stairway; its construction appears flimsy and impermanent.
- B. Historical Context: In 1826 this lot sold for \$74, whereas in 1830 the property was purchased by Henry Dorsey for \$2,200, indicating the construction period. Nicholas Cresswell, the longtime occupant, trained as a potter, but the 1850 census lists him as a merchant, and a decade later he is identified as a farmer; in 1870 he is listed as a retired merchant (Harshbarger, 47). In 1851 he served as president of the school board; a portrait of Cresswell by local painter Jeremy Wilson (ca. 1840s) hangs in the Alexandria library.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This five-bay, Federal-style house is built on a center-hall plan with parapet ends and paired chimneys. A Classical Revival porch located on the front and east sides of the house, as well as other details, reflect a dwelling of noticeable high-style construction.
2. Condition of the fabric: Fair.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: Approximately 40' x 32'.
2. Foundations: Cut stone.
3. Wall construction: Brick, with Flemish-bond coursing on the main facade.
4. Structural system, framing: Load-bearing brick.
5. Porches: The Classical Revival front porch has a very low slope and shed roof, supported by four Doric columns with fluted shafts; the two front columns are free-standing, the rear two are attached half-columns. The raised porch has a brick base with wood treads and deck.

The east gable end features a one-story porch that has been partially enclosed: similar features include four full and two half columns; the foundation is composed of brick piers. The hipped roof slope is normal, with wide eaves. The remaining porch area is located in the front of this space, including a wood baluster with simple supports. The rear portion of this 'porch' has been bricked in to create the office room; this is accessed by a south door off the porch.

A full shed-roofed porch extends across the north, rear facade that is supported by five square posts with decorative molding.

6. Chimneys: Double brick gable-end interior chimneys.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The six-panel front door is flanked by three-light sidelights and is topped by a semicircular decorated fanlight. The east gable-end porch accesses the interior via double glazed French doors topped by a single-light transom. The easternmost paneled wood back door has a glazed upper section, topped by a three-light transom.
The door on the south face of the brick addition is a four-paneled wood door with a single-light transom.

- b. Windows: The first-story windows are nine-over-six-light double-hung sash with simple wood casing; the second-story windows are six-over-six-light. On the rear facade, the center second-story window is dropped the height of one sash. The brick addition features one-over-one-light and nine-over-six-light double-hung wood sash. All major windows feature highly visible jack-arch lintels; the wood shutters are typically four-paneled on the first floor and louvered on the second. Original shutter hardware is extant.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Gable roof with parapet ends; asphalt shingles have replaced the original slate covering.
- b. Cornice: Four-stepped wooden cornice.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. Cellar: A full cellar.
- b. First floor: Two rooms flank each side of the center hall. The southeast corner contains the dining room, the northeast room the kitchen. The west half of the house forms a double parlor, divided by a squared off entryway that fills almost the entirety of this wall, and flanked by two large Ionic columns. Classical molding extends the length of the upper opening.
- c. Second floor: The second floor contains four large rooms originally used as bedrooms. The northeast corner space has been converted into a bathroom, according to the present owner, the first one in Alexandria.

- 2. Stairways: The main, open-welled stairway leads north from the hall up the east wall of the hall, turning south at the landing up to the second floor. This is repeated between the second floor and attic. A closed-well stairway runs from the northwest section of the upstairs bathroom, south along the west wall, to turn into the southwest corner of the kitchen. A closed-well stairway runs between the kitchen and cellar.
- 3. Flooring: Wood, partially covered with linoleum.
- 4. Wall and ceiling finish: Plaster and wallpaper.
- 5. Doorways and doors: The door frames have bull's-eye moldings in the squared corners. Doors on the first floor are six-paneled wood; the upstairs doors may

be seven-paneled.

6. Decorative features: The double-parlor opening is highly decorated with columns and moldings. There are fireplaces in each room; all feature Classical moldings except for the one in the southwest parlor, which is a marbled Victorian design.
- D. Site: The Israel Grafius house is located near the east end of Main Street's north side, very close to the bridge that crosses the Juniata River. Across the street to the west, on the southeast corner, is a large brick residence that for many years served as a store. Directly across the street is a bar. A large yard is on the west, while another building lies only 1-1/2' from the west wall of the house.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Old views (in Hartslog Heritage, 36).

- B. Primary and unpublished sources:

Porter Township tax records, 1819 to 1859, Huntingdon County Historical Society.

Alexandria Borough tax records, 1859 to 1873, Huntingdon County Historical Society and Huntingdon County Courthouse.

Huntingdon County Deed Books and Probate Records, Huntingdon County Courthouse, Huntingdon, Pennsylvania.

Huntingdon County Tax Map -- Alexandria, 01-02-52.

Huntingdon County Historical Society survey sheets.

- C. Secondary and published sources:

Africa, J. Simpson. History of Huntingdon and Blair Counties, Pennsylvania. Philadelphia: Louis H. Everts, 1883.

Harshbarger, Jean P., Nancy R. Taylor, Sara H. Zabriskie, and F.R. Zabriskie. Hartslog Heritage. State College, Pennsylvania: K-B Offset printing, Inc.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was conducted by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record in cooperation with the America's Industrial Heritage Project under the directorship of Randy Cooley; AIHP is an undertaking of the National Park Service, based in Hollidaysburg, Pennsylvania. Recorded under the direction of Robert J. Kapsch, chief of

HABS/HAER, the project was completed during summer 1988 at the HABS field office in Johnstown, Pennsylvania. Project leader was Alison K. Hoagland, senior HABS historian; field supervisor was Dorothy Burlingame, University of Vermont; project historian, Karen Genskow, Sangamon State University. Large-format photography is by David Ames. Editing of the final report was done by Sara Amy Leach, HABS historian.

This report was completed as part of a larger project documenting two canal towns--Saltsburg, on the Western Division of the Pennsylvania Mainline Canal, and Alexandria, on the Juniata Division--flanking the Allegheny Divide. Twenty-one reports on other buildings in Alexandria, an overview history of Alexandria (HABS No. PA-5407), and of canal town development in Pennsylvania (HABS No. PA-5666) are part of the HABS/HAER collection. Twenty-two reports on buildings in Saltsburg (Indiana County) and an overview history of Saltsburg (HABS No. PA-5438) are also available. Results of the project were published as Two Historic Pennsylvania Canal Towns: Alexandria and Saltsburg, Sara Amy Leach, editor (Washington, DC: Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record, National Park Service, March 1989).